

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
Writing Curricular Calendar, Kindergarten, 2012-2013
Unit Two - Looking Closely: Observing, Labeling, and Listing Like Scientists

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Unit Two – Looking Closely: Observing, Labeling, and Listing Like Scientists

October/November

Overview

This popular RWP unit was developed to serve three important purposes. First, it is designed to help children develop the foundational skills that will put them in good stead as they move from emergent toward conventional reading and writing. Approximately one month from now, we hope that most of your children are beginning to read leveled books and are writing in such a way that they (and you) can reread their writing. Prior to this unit, children were encouraged to read and write “as best they can,” even if that meant that they drew, told, and improvised exciting stories without really using many letters. This unit channels them to transfer and apply their knowledge of letters and sounds to labeling items and listing observations. You might say the unit positions children to slow down their reading and writing, pressing the pause button on their fast-paced plots, to write labels and sentences. Children, then, are able to take the time necessary to stretch out each word, listening not only to the first sound, but to every sound after that. The unit also channels children toward writing list books, pattern books, and books with simple sentences that will likely revolve around high-frequency words.

Then, too, the unit is designed to teach children that writing is not only a tool for storytelling; it is also a tool for learning about science. Writing is a means through which children can study and come to know about (and eventually to teach about) the wonderful world of science. This, of course, is an important part of the Common Core State Standards, which call for kindergarten writers to “use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic” (CCSS W 2). The Standards also state that kindergarten children will be able to “recall information from experiences or various sources in order to answer questions” (W 8). This unit allows them to begin to work toward these goals as they notice ways that they can write about the world around them.

It would be difficult to overemphasize how important it is for children to understand writing as a tool for learning in the content areas. Many children are enthralled by any chance they get to study bugs, trees and plants, water and rocks. It is crucial that schools give children opportunities to learn about the world and to expand their background knowledge. It is equally important that schools let children know that in the real world millions of people use writing as a tool for organizing, holding on to, and using whatever the content is they want to learn.

Of course, a third reason the unit exists is because writing matters, and, because science matters. Providing children with opportunities to learn about rich, engaging content matters. This unit provides opportunities to see that learning about one thing leads to learning about lots of other things. Writing about a shared research topic, such as trees, provides a supportive scaffold for

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young kindergarten writers early in the year (CCSS W K.7). Young children, of course, are dying to know how acorns turn into oak trees, where animals go in the winter, and why leaves fall from trees. It is a very good thing, then, when children are reading not only words, but, as educator and philosopher Paulo Freire has described it, are “reading the world.”

Before Launching the Unit

In this month, you will invite children to observe, collect, and study bits of their world. You can decide to channel this study toward any topic you like: birds, weather, water, plants, and so on. This write-up, however, is written as if you have invited the children to study plants and trees, especially focusing on the question, “How do trees change across the seasons?” By studying a topic across days and weeks, and by giving children the opportunity to apply and transfer their content knowledge in multiple contexts, you lift the level of the thinking the children are doing, and lift the level of your teaching. Teaching that allows children to apply and transfer content and skills independently could be characterized as “high level,” according to Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK). You will want to alter the following plans accordingly if you choose other topics. Whatever the topic, at the start of the unit you may tell your kids that they’ve been writing great stories, and authors often do write books that brim with stories. Tell the children that there are, however, other ways to write, and that in this unit they will learn to write like scientists.

Many RWP classrooms adopt a tree of their very own outside the school building, to observe and study not just for this unit, but across the year, allowing children to see first-hand how trees respond to changes in the seasons. You’ll want to nudge children to notice the changing colors of leaves, leaves falling, the difference between leaves and needles. As part of this, you’ll probably want to connect some of your read-alouds and discuss how different parts of the tree are structured to allow it to survive the changing of the seasons year after year.

Once you have decided on the kind of writing the children will do, you can then provide them the materials that match your hopes and expectations. If you read ahead in this write-up, you’ll see that we suggest you bring a few boxes of large zip-top baggies to school so that children can collect “science artifacts” (leaves, twigs, acorns, pine cones, and more) on writerly walks to bring to your classroom. We suggest you gather trays or some other container in which to store the items children collect. We suggest you find books children can read or at least reread, after you have read repeatedly, on the topic you are studying. We recommend magnifying glasses. The key point is that you absolutely will not want to put all these materials out for the children from the start, because you’ll use the materials to excite new work as the unit unfolds.

The materials matter because they help youngsters assume new roles, new identities. For this, you’ll need special kinds of paper. You may, for example, give them blank researchers’ notepads and colored pencils (they’re better for capturing subtle details than the markers children may have used until now). Then again, you may give each student a clipboard. You may also decide

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to send these clipboards home so children continue to live “writerly lives” outside as well as inside the classroom. You’ll need to organize the artifacts that students bring in from the world, making them accessible during writing time. You’ll probably set up trays or baskets of these artifacts, moving them to the center of tables (or moving kids around trays on the rug) during work time so that children can shift between studying a leaf and writing about it.

Once your research materials have been gathered, you will probably want to inaugurate the unit of study by taking your children on a writerly/scientific walk somewhere, showing them that scientists find interesting things anywhere in the world: a little plant growing in the crack of the sidewalk, the rough feel of the bark on the trees lining the street, little beads of raindrops on the playground swings. Teach children that scientists and writers pay attention and say, “Wow!” They pull in close to really look, to really listen, and then capture whatever they see and hear on the page.

On some of your excursions, encourage children to collect objects to bring back to the classroom. When classes returned from neighborhood walks in years past, the students came in with red cheeks, huge smiles, and gallon-sized zip-lock bags overflowing with leaves. They dumped their scientific loot onto their desks and began observing. Some commented on the different sizes of the leaves, others discussed the colors, some counted how many leaves they collected, while others took leaves by the stem and rolled them in their fingers, pretending they were helicopters. They held up the leaves and looked with wide eyes and discussed their observations with all who would listen, growing the vocabulary that they would soon be writing in their books: “Look at this one, it is huge!” “I got a yellow jagged one!” The children were completely engaged and full of an excitement that lasted the entire unit.

As you help your children learn to value paying close attention to the world, you’ll probably want to read aloud books that celebrate this aspect of the writerly life. Try Byrd Baylor’s *I’m in Charge of Celebrations* (1995), or *The Other Way to Listen* (1997). Joanne Ryder’s books also illustrate the wide-awakeness you’re trying to teach, as do Valerie Worth’s poems, especially those in her work *All the Small Poems and Fourteen More* (1996).

Think, also, about the time frame for this month’s RWP writing workshop. If your writing workshop has been less than an hour until now, you will want to alter that for this unit. By now, children are able to work on their writing for far longer stretches of time than they could earlier in the year. Because this unit combines writing and science instruction, you’ll want to extend the work even beyond an hour if you have time to do so.

Assessment

For the first few weeks of school, your focus was on teaching children to express themselves through pictures and drawing, through teacher/student talk, and through whole class, partnership, and small group conversation. By now you’ve come to know your students well, and there is

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most likely a range of writing abilities in your classroom. With some children still learning to draw representationally (so that the picture looks somewhat like the actual object), and others beginning to write strings of letters, or even hearing and recording some of the sounds in words. As always, the challenge is to find ways to work with each individual at his or her level, while also bearing in mind the grade-specific benchmarks provided by the Common Core State Standards.

Last month, we suggested that you make some decisions about how to assess the progress of your writers. If you opted to assess for all three of the CCSS strands (narrative, informational, and persuasive writing), then you already have a baseline for this unit. If not, then now is the time to do an initial assessment of what your children can do, by prompting your writers to do some informational writing, on demand.

To do this type of periodic assessment, you will give your children a three-page booklet and ask them to write a “teaching text” or an “all about” containing information about a topic they know well. Prompt them to write about anything they choose, and write one thing they know on each page. This is meant as an initial assessment, so you won’t be conferring or teaching into the writing they do on this day, just observing and encouraging children to do the best they can. Plan to use one writing workshop to do this, though it may take less time than that. You may stop when most or all of your children have run out of stamina, noting how many minutes your class was able to sustain their writing, and making notes on individual children. Some children might write several three page booklets in the amount of time that others complete just one (another thing to note, volume). Collect all of the pieces to see what was produced, and use the RWP *Informational Writing Continuum* (which is aligned to the CCSS) to determine a writing level for each child. This will help you decide what to teach in terms of structure, elaboration, craft, cohesion, and meaning. This assessment will also help you determine the types of paper to start off with (how many pages in the booklets, and how many lines of writing), as well as what to teach to your whole class versus what to teach to small groups or individuals in this unit, so that you can differentiate for the range of needs in your class. You will want to do a summative assessment at the end of the unit exactly like this one, so that you can compare what students were able to do before the unit with what they can produce after the unit (sometimes this is referred to as “pre-” and “post-” assessment).

Within the unit, you should rely on your formative assessments, such as conferences and small group work as data-in-hand. Use this information to assess that students are on track and to teach into the things they are not yet grasping in order to support their progress.

In this unit, your goals will include Common Core Standards for both writing and speaking and listening, as well as a few reading standards. As mentioned in Unit One, we suggest that you can expect entering kindergartners to “compose informative/explanatory texts” (CCSS W.K.2). By the year’s end, they should be able not just to compose informative/explanatory texts, but to

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compose ones in which they “name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic” (W K.2). This unit will set them up to work toward these goals and will provide many opportunities for repeated practice. It is possible, even likely, that by the end of this unit some of your children may be producing work that is approaching or even at the end-of-the-year benchmark for kindergarten, while others will still need much more practice. You will see that there are many chances for informational writing across the year.

Of course, like many of the kindergarten writing units, there is an ulterior motive—to teach important *reading* skills. As your children compose informational texts of their own, they are in fact doing much of the work they need to do in order to meet the Common Core State Standards for Reading Informational Texts, especially the strand concerning Key Ideas and Details. Specifically, throughout this unit they will learn to “ask and answer questions about key details in a text” (CCSS RI K.1), when talking with partners and discussing their books with each other. Children will also learn to “identify the main topic and retell key details of a text” (RI K.2). They will be studying this from the inside-out by creating books that stay on a topic and tell information across the pages (parallel to the work they do as readers, naming the topic and telling the information across pages). Lastly, as readers, your children will learn to “describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text” (RI K.3), particularly in the later half of the unit, when you teach children that they can compare and contrast, make connections, and grow ideas that can be included in their writing.

Bend One – Living Like Writers, Living Like Scientists

From the start of the RWP unit, you will probably encourage children to write in three- to five-page booklets, because booklets have the lovely advantage of always containing another page and therefore of providing built-in encouragement to keep going, to do more. The pages in the booklets need to contain plenty of room for nice, big observational drawings with labels. By this time in the year, you'll probably want booklets that contain at least a few lines at the bottom of each page, signaling that children should by now be writing sentences, as well as labels. It's hard to emphasize the extent to which materials themselves convey expectations, and you want these to be always marching a few steps ahead of children. Materials should change throughout the year, like clothes to grow into.

Remember, most kindergartners write with big letters, so they will need lots of space if they are going to write words to accompany their drawings. Some teachers even opt to use legal size paper for this unit, making it possible for kids to have plenty of space to draw life-sized diagrams of leaves and still have room to write a few lines at the bottom. Your children can be writing in booklets right from the start of the unit—no need to limit them to taking one page at a time. The presence of lines at the bottom of each page should convey an important message to your students—but it will be equally important for you to supply students with tons of blank books, conveying the expectation that they will write a whole lot of these. One book a week would be

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far, far too little writing—they can write even more than one book a day! The more books your children write, the more opportunities they have to write words.

Certainly you will want to encourage your kids to start another book as soon as they finish the first. Ask expectation-laden questions: “How many books have you written so far today?” “How many books do you think you’ll write today?” “How many books do you have in your folder so far?” Be sure to celebrate the high volume and stamina that this unit is sure to generate. What could be more engaging for children than working with leaves and twigs, acorns and pine cones in hand?

This is an opportunity for children to apply and transfer all that they learned in Unit 1. If a few children become stuck, or aren’t sure how to organize their writing across pages—you’ll invite them to problem-solve along with you, saying, “Hmm... I see you’re having trouble getting started. What do you think you could do first?” This is a higher level of teaching and thinking, the kind of strategic emphasized in Webb’s DOK.

It is predictable that a few of your children will jump from topic to topic, writing something different on each page of their booklet, or that some of your children will put all of their energy into their pictures, neglecting to attempt writing letters or words. Since the Common Core State Standards ask that kindergartners’ informative texts name a topic and supply some information about the topic (W K.2), it is important that you teach your writers to stay focused on one particular subject as they write. Use your conferring notes as data-in-hand to keep track of the students who are not yet doing this, and meet with them in small groups to coach them into staying longer with one topic and adding labels to everything (spelling as best they can). As you confer with your individual writers, try to figure out a theory for each of your children, “What kind of writer is this? What does he or she tend to do often (not just one time)? Is there a pattern in this child’s behavior as a writer that I could teach into?”

A few of your minilessons will probably teach students that, as they study, they’ll find themselves wanting to know more, and that the great thing is that more information is available in lots of places. One of those places is the pages of books. Perhaps you’ll demonstrate a minilesson where the class “participates in shared research” (CCSS W K.7), reading from the pages of a big book and then incorporating a piece of information into a shared writing project together. Before long, your children will no doubt convince you to allow them to keep book baggies or book bins brimming with books on your topic, alongside the science materials. Keep in mind, the Common Core State Standards include the expectation that kindergartners will learn to “gather information from experiences or from provided sources to answer a question” (W K.8), and this RWP unit explicitly teaches kindergartners how to do research, using a combination of experiences, observations, and teacher provided books and other sources.

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Of course, adding books to the mix adds a world of instruction. "If you want to know the scientific word for the little lines on a leaf—and of course, you'll always want the scientific word—then the book can tell you!" The words will sometimes be long and hard to read, but your children will be able to figure out many of these words out using pictures and the vocabulary resources you will have provided during shared reading and read-aloud. You could teach yet more lessons about using academic vocabulary, encouraging children to not just copy the words they find in books, blindly, letter by letter, but to try saying the word slowly, perhaps clapping out the syllables so they can articulate the word clearly.

Praise children's remarkable ability to see the world. Encourage them to pick up bits and pieces, to put these things on trays, to examine them closely and to draw them with an eye for detail. Stop children as they work, holding up one drawing or another, and talk about the smart ways in which one child used shape and color or another used size to make the item look real. Make photocopies of some of their work in progress and hang it around the room or display it proudly on a shelf or taped to a chart. Congratulate children publicly for spending extended periods of time on one single drawing, adding more and more detail to it, saying "Ooh" and "Ahh" when a child fills an entire page with a drawing of a wee little acorn. That child has made a small item very big, and scientists (and writers) do the same thing.

Whether you have given your students colored pencils or markers, the unit will begin with a renewed commitment to making representational drawings, this time with writers working especially hard to capture details with precision, just as scientists do. In an earlier write-up, we at the RWP pointed out that teaching children to draw representationally is significant work because this is teaching them to conjure up a mental picture of a topic and then to work to capture that image, that idea, with fidelity onto the page. The effort to put life onto the page, with detail, is fundamental to the writing process. Encourage children who are tracing to try to notice and draw the details on their own so that their writing is a place to practice close noticing, drawing representationally, with an emphasis on the process of observing and thinking, taking one's time, rather than a quick fix for a final product.

Of course this is writing time, so any drawing that children do will be a prelude to writing—and that writing needs to thread through most of every day's workshop. This means that as the year unfolds you should see children writing for increasing lengths of time, producing more and more text. As always, you'll need to use your understanding of what your children can do in order to guide each child toward the writing that he or she should be achieving.

For some small groups of children, you may teach them to make many labels each day, and as part of this, you will teach them to say words slowly, stretching them out, hearing the first sound, recording the letter that matches that sound, then rereading what they have written, continuing on through the word so the child hears and then records the second phoneme. As you do this, you will be helping those children draw on what they know about letters and sounds. Some children may still rely on letter names for their sense of the sound the letter makes. (This works as a

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starting strategy because usually the name of a letter contains the sound associated with that letter.) Some children will already be hearing and recording beginning and ending consonant sounds, if not all the phonemes in a word, and you'll want to teach strategy lessons to these groups of children to draw on their growing knowledge of letter-sound correspondence, known words and visual information when they write. This is important work to teach into across all units, as the Common Core State Standards expect kindergarten writers to "write a letter or letters for most consonant and short-vowel sounds (phonemes)" by the end of the year (CCSS L.W.2.c).

For groups of children who are hearing and attempting to record most of the consonant sounds in a word (and starting to use and confuse vowels), nudge them to write a sentence under each picture, but be careful not to overstep—this RWP unit is not meant to be a "fill-in-the-blank" unit where the teacher provides all the patterns, and the children supply the missing words. The big idea in this unit is that children will invent their own sentences and patterns, giving them an insider's understanding about language that will support them in reading as well as in speaking and listening. If children are stuck, you could refer them to the growing list of accountable talk prompts you should by now have displayed on a chart in your room. Surely by now your children are familiar with the prompts, "I notice . . ." "I wonder . . ." or "I think . . ." During read-aloud, when you stop to give children opportunities to talk about books, you can coach them to use these prompts in their conversations; then all of these prompts and more can be used to inspire sentences in their science writing.

Throughout the first part in this RWP unit, writing partners can play an important role in keeping your kindergartners engaged and independent. Teach your kids that when writers are stuck they should first try their best and move on, but that sometimes all writers need a little help. Tell them that, during independent writing time, when you really aren't sure what to do or can't remember what something is called, you can whisper to your writing partner for help, then go right back to your own work.

Each day you'll probably also want to have some structured partner time. The excitement of all the science materials lends itself easily to children talking with partners—they go off to their tables and there's all these exciting artifacts waiting for them. Your children's reaction should be "Yippee!" Why fight it? Make the most out of their talk by encouraging them to use the actual scientific vocabulary: veins, stems, leaves, bark, instead of vague language: thing, stuff, it. Some teachers find it helpful to actually have five minutes or so of partner time first before switching to independent writing time. You can direct your partner time by saying, "Take a few minutes to meet with your partner to talk about what you're going to write today," allowing children to be excited (and possibly noisy) while they are gathering ideas from what their partners say, before turning their attention to writing and transitioning into quiet work time. Of course, this supports the work kindergartners need to do in relation to the Speaking and Listening standards, which state that children will learn to "Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners

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about *kindergarten topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups” (CCSS SL K.1).

Bend Two – Making Books Just Like the Ones We Read: Studying Mentor Texts and Reading/Writing Connections

Throughout your day, and through the weeks, you’ll be reading aloud texts that support the content of this unit: books about trees, plants, seasons; poems, big books, charts, and texts that you and your children have created together. It is likely that one child will help you make the discovery (that you’ll then share with the class) that the books you’ve been studying together can not only be sources for answers and information, they can also become mentor texts. You might say, “You know those science books at your tables? The books we’ve studied together? We can write books just like these about our own topics! About leaves or trees or our walk outside!”

Before long, students will be pointing out to you that the books written by grown-up scientists all have covers with titles that relate to the main idea of the text, and that all the books have at least one sentence and often more on a page, and your young scientists will resolve to do likewise. You can help students discover that some of their just-right science books are written in a patterned way and some contain a twist at the end. Naturally, youngsters will want to write in similar ways. You’ll see children writing list books with one phrase or label per page: The leaf. The stick. The bark. You should expect other children to be writing simple sentences or patterns like, This leaf is yellow. This leaf is red. This leaf is green. Again, the materials you provide will make all the difference. It is likely that with some coaching, many of your children will easily grasp the Common Core Craft and Structure expectations for kindergarten, and will even gesture toward the first grade standards for “identifying the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book” (RI K.5), and “knowing and using various text features” (RI 1.5).

In a one-to-one conference, perhaps you and one writer could compare a leveled book from the child’s own reading workshop book baggy with the one he is writing—maybe even simply counting the number of pages in each. If his own book is shorter than the one the grown-up scientist had written, then your youngster could set that right with just a stapler and some extra pages. This work, of course, can become the centerpiece for a minilesson or a mid-workshop share session as you invite other students to engage in similar work.

Some groups of children might benefit from learning to write different kinds of sentences (complex sentences, with a variety of language structures and punctuation). You might teach your whole class to notice that sometimes the books we read ask questions and suggest that some of them may want to try writing a book of questions. Some children might even try writing a book of questions and answers. This will help children move toward meeting the standard of understanding and using question words (CCSS L K.1d). Playing around with syntax will give kids plenty of practice with a new kind of sentence, and more options for kinds of books to write, and a new way to think about the science they are studying—scientists ask questions at least as

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often as they record facts. You can add both to the list of options they have collected by now (that list now includes all of the structures you've taught so far in this unit: label books, list books, books with sentences, now questions, questions and answers). But beware of simply assigning kids to write question/answer books—doing this will lower the level of thinking kids are doing (keep in mind Webb's DOK), which places greater emphasis on students' ability to transfer and apply what they have learned on their own, rather than simply completing assignments and following teacher directions).

By now, you've done quite a bit of work to help children learn and use scientific vocabulary of your subject during read-alouds, shared reading, and science time. If your scientists are studying trees, their writing should include terms like stem, veins, bark, and twigs. The CCSS Language Skills suggest that by the end of the year in kindergarten students should demonstrate the ability to learn the meanings of new words and apply them in their own writing. During read-aloud, shared reading, and your science instruction, you may want to add scientific words to a science word wall or chart. Add the words one or two at a time, as they come up in your reading and shared experiences. Write the words large on sentence strips or index cards, like you would for your usual word wall words. You might include picture clues for these new vocabulary words to help your young readers access the meaning of the words when they glance up at the science word wall to find a word, not just for talking to partners, but also to use in their own writing.

As this RWP unit evolves, be sure that more and more children progress from hearing the initial sounds in words to hearing and recording all the phonemes. Identify the children whose spellings do not yet show that they've mastered the idea that each sound needs to lead to at least one mark, one letter, and give those children a great deal of repeated scaffolding. They should practice making labels every day, with you providing the support for stretching words out, hearing more constituent sounds, so that those children should be able to graduate soon to writing sentences underneath their pictures. Your goal will be for them to write so that they can reread their writing, using one-to-one matching, and so that you can reread their writing too, or at least long stretches of it. You may want to suggest that when children progress to sentences, they first simply write, "I see the. . . ." This may seem like fairly dull writing, but it is not dull to the children. Remember that these children are on the brink of learning to read conventionally, and one of the most important things they can learn is the concept of one-to-one matching. Even if a child writes a text as "boring" as, "I see the green leaf. I see the red leaf," and then the child reads that text back, pointing at each word as she reads it, that child is making gigantic strides.

It will be important for you to encourage children to leave spaces between their words (and through this, to develop more of an understanding of the difference between words and letters). If children squish their letters together without spaces between words, teach them to reread, making slashes where they might want spaces. Another way is to listen to what the child wants to say, and then repeat each word, making one blank on the child's page where each word will go.

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The writer can then touch each blank, saying aloud what he or she will write, and then record a word in each blank.

Bend Three – Writing More!: Elaboration, Writing Phrases or Sentences, Adding Details and Information

As part of teaching children to become inspired to write books just like the ones they read, you will want to teach elaboration. We at the RWP suggest you will not only want to help students write more information about their topics (CCSS W K.2), but you will want to support them in strengthening their writing by adding new information and writing with details (W K.5). You might begin by teaching children that writers revise to include even more information. As writers learn more and more about their topic, they go back to their old books and add in the new information. Often the writer decides to do a whole new drawing, and perhaps this whole new drawing might be one that zooms in on an object, allowing the writer/scientist and the viewer to notice more. Scientists, of course, sometimes revise to add more detail using magnifying lenses. If you have any on hand, they will certainly fire up your children's work, especially if you saved them just for this part of the unit. Even if you don't have magnifying lenses, you can make "zoom lenses" from three-by-five index cards that have a one-inch hole cut out of the center to encourage children to focus on the smaller details of a larger object.

If earlier you decided to teach some groups of children toward list books, they may have gone like this: "I see the leaf. I see the acorn. I see the pine cone." Now you will want to also teach them to elaborate—to think and write more. There are lots of ways to help children elaborate, and the most essential method will be to nudge them to talk about and write whatever they notice or think or wonder about an object. You can also teach elaboration by emphasizing not only what writers do (revise and add more detail) but what scientists do. For example, you teach children that scientists usually write what they see first, but then they look again, this time for more details: "I see the leaf. It has little holes in it." Of course, it is also important to teach children (if they are ready for this) to alternate between recording what they see and recording what they think; for example, "I see the leaf. Why is it red?" Children could also observe and write from photographs some of the time in the same manner. This should nudge kids even further toward grasping the Common Core Standards for Writing Informational Texts.

Helping children write whatever is on their minds will also entail teaching them to be inventive spellers, tackling words fearlessly. This means that if some children are currently writing with just one or two sounds, you will want to encourage them to slow down and listen for more sounds. If you notice other children starting to represent some vowel sounds, this will inform your word study, where you will want to spend a little time teaching them about short vowels and how to use them to spell. You may convene other groups to work on using known words to spell unknown words. All of this will be possible because children will be using their high-frequency words and patterns to write with greater fluency. Since many of their sentences will flow quickly, writers will have more energy to spell the tricky words with increasingly complex

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spelling strategies. The CCSS Foundational Skills suggests that students should be able to understand directionality and that words are separated by spaces in print. For some of your students who have lots of experiences with print, writing from left to right and top to bottom will come naturally. Some students might need more prompting for directionality as they write. After a student writes a word you might say, "Where will you write the next word?" to get kids used to writing left to right and top to bottom as they write sentences.

Remember, as this RWP unit progresses, children will be churning out a lot of little books. They will probably write approximately three a week, each with three to five pages. The lovely thing about this is that when you teach children something new, you can encourage them to revise previously written books, adding whatever you've most recently taught to those earlier books. This means that if a child draws and labels for the first week-and-a-half of this study, and then you teach her to write sentences, she might go back and reread her existing collection, this time adding a sentence to elaborate on every page of her earlier books. If you teach another child that in addition to recording observations, he could also record his thoughts, and if you suggest one way to revise is to ask questions, that child could reread all his books, changing "I see the leaf" to "What do I see? I see the leaf," or, "I see the leaf. I wonder why it is green."

Bend Four – Becoming Researchers: Scientists Think, Make Connections, Predict, Have Ideas, Compare and Contrast—And So Do Writers (Independent Projects)

So far the emphasis in this unit has been on making observations, collecting information and details, and recording those details on the page through drawing and writing labels and sentences—and for many kindergarten classrooms this can and should be the emphasis for the remainder of the unit. If this is the case for your group of kindergartners, an option for you would be to wrap up the unit by having children choose a collection of their work so far, and spend the last few days of the unit preparing to publish those pieces. This write-up, however, presents another option, one that provides the opportunity for children to transfer and apply (DOK) all that they know about informational writing to science topics of their own choice. Rather than wrapping up now, you may decide to end the unit by allowing each of your children to take on a science topic of their own and to become an expert on that that topic in order to teach others.

By this point, you have read aloud quite a few books about plants, trees, or whatever science topic you have chosen for the unit. Surely you have also been reading aloud a number of books related to the changing seasons. Now is the time to set up baskets of resources related to apples, pumpkins, snow, weather, and any other science-related topics that the children should be familiar with. Then allow your children to choose a topic to study. You may want to structure it so that ultimately, there are groups of children working on the topics for which you have materials. Of course, if you have not been teaching much additional content all along, you could still set up baskets of materials and take extra care to gather each group to not only teach into the writing they are doing, but also the vocabulary and information to go with the topic. You might read aloud to the group, or do some shared reading or writing, or simply have a conversation

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with the group—"Why do they think some apples turn red? What do you think is inside a gourd? How do pumpkins grow? And what does all this have to do with trees and the seasons? What is the same and what is different from what we know from studying leaves?"

Encourage your children to use what they know from the read-alouds as well as the science materials in front of them. Teach them that we can also write books about what we know—not just about what's in front of us (CCSS W K.7, K.8). So, for example, kids can write books that are about "picking pumpkins" or "how pumpkins grow" or "places to buy pumpkins" because all these are things that they have either studied this year, or they know from their own experiences. You might even make copies of the cover of each read-aloud to make an easy-to-see list of all the books you've read so far about the topic. You may want to display the read-alouds you've done in an easy-to-access part of the room, or even make a chart for each read-aloud (as you are reading it, of course) to remind kids of the key content they've learned so that kids can access that information during the RWP writing workshop.

In many classrooms, the work children will do in their new topic-based studies will be the culmination of the strategies they have already learned. They will make detailed drawings, write lots of labels, and write sentences, and even patterns using everything you have already taught—transferring it and applying it to a new topic of their own, with fewer whole class shared writing experiences and teacher demonstrations to rely on, because they'll be studying a topic at their table rather than a topic the whole class is writing about at the same time.

However, for some classrooms, particularly in classrooms where children are already beginning to write sentences, you may want to take the next step and teach your children new ways to think about the science content they've been studying. For example, you might teach your class that, yes, scientists (and writers) do record exactly what they see in front of them, right down to the last detail, but they also can push themselves to think, "Why?" "Why do leaves change colors?" "Why does . . ." "What is the reason . . ." Then writers can stretch their thinking even farther by making a prediction (or hypothesis). "Maybe..." or "Probably..." are good prompts for encouraging children to hypothesize about the science artifacts in front of them, using all that you've taught them by now through read-alouds, science instruction, science walks, and so on.

Another option, either for small groups of children or for your whole class, is to arrange the science materials in ways that lend themselves to comparison and contrast. You might place a basket of different kinds of apples at one table, different gourds at another, pine cones and nuts at another, and varieties of pumpkins at another for the writers to study. Then teach your children that writers often look closely at objects to notice and write about what is the same and what is different. Together, you might sort a basket of mixed leaves, or pine cones, or twigs, talking about what makes them each the same or different as you go—perhaps even writing as you go. You might create a chart with your kids that lists some language for comparing and contrasting. "I noticed . . . is the same as. . ." "They both . . ." or "I noticed . . . is different from. . ." "One

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has . . . but the other has. . . ." Then children can use that language to make comparisons related to their own topics.

As children become ready for more challenges, there will be a host of possibilities. You can nudge them toward more precise words, braver choices, or using comparisons to show what they mean: "Some apples are red like roses," or "The pumpkin is round like a basketball." You can extend what they do by encouraging them to wonder and to question, perhaps even letting their curiosity lead to small experiments. For instance, the question "I wonder what is inside the apple?" will ideally be followed with possible answers, and you will want to teach children helpful phrases such as, "Could it be...?" or "Is it because of...?" The apple scientist might conjecture that inside the apple must be seeds, and that could lead to an experiment (or in this case, a dissection, led by the teacher). This might followed by, "What happens if we plant them? Will they grow into apple trees?" Chances are good that you will not get to this work within one unit, but it will likely spark continued work around a shared inquiry, preferably one that brings fascinating stuff into your room (and that brings your children out of the room!) long after the writing curriculum has moved on.

As the unit nears its end, you may want to ramp up the rereading work that children are doing during writing workshop. Encourage them to use everything they know from the RWP reading workshop to read their own writing (to themselves and to partners during partner time each day): pointing to one word at a time, making sure that the words make sense, rereading to smooth out their voices. You can teach your kindergartners that writers reread their own writing again and again to make sure that it makes sense, sounds good, and looks right. Writers read with pencils in hand, ready to make changes as needed.

You'll also want to make sure that your students have a clear sense of who their audience will be for publishing their work. Near the end of the unit, each of your children can pick one or two of the many books they have written in this unit to return to and publish. Will their published books be on display in the school library? Does your school have a science lab or science bulletin board? Perhaps you'll invite another class to come and visit so that your children can present one or two of their books to a partner from another classroom. However you decide to publish, you can get the most out of this last part of the unit by reminding children that for the last few days, they'll be getting their writing ready to share with other people, real live people, who are going to read their books. They can add more labels, more words, more details, maybe even add color, a cover, or an "about the author" page to "fancy it up" and get ready to share.